

## The Future For Primary Physical Education

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### Abstract

An in-depth examination of secondary research was undertaken together with a focussed case study to investigate whether current practices within primary physical education (PE) were best serving the learning needs of children in primary schools. A secondary purpose of this research was to examine the implications for this area of primary education regarding the professionalisation of sports coaching.

The study was conducted within a unitary authority in the South West of England. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, firstly with both Partnership Development Managers (PDMs), followed up by questionnaires carried out with all of their School Sport Co-ordinators (SSCo's). Subsequent semi-structured interviews were then conducted with a primary school head teacher, a head of primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE), and with the only specialist primary PE teacher found within this authority. These research processes extrapolated information which highlighted current practices in many primary schools with regards to their PE delivery, and the findings illustrated that whilst current PE provision in most secondary schools was generally believed to be of a high standard, embracing recent initiatives and the current National Curriculum, the delivery of PE in primary schools was found to be less consistent. After several processes of inductive research it was concluded that widespread changes in the whole primary PE provision, starting from Initial Teacher Education, ought to be considered.

### Introduction

The quality of teaching in primary physical education (PE), and the subsequent learning experience offered, has been a much discussed contention for some time. Perhaps more so recently with the proposed changes to education, and specifically PE, as a result of recent curriculum reviews. Sloan (2010:269) claims, 'there is considerable consensus that, in spite of the many excellent lifelines that have been thrown, primary PE is in serious trouble'. In fact, there is little evidence to support any claim that current Primary Initial Teacher Training (ITT) adequately prepares trainee primary school teachers to teach PE. Indeed, most evidence appears to be to the contrary (Price, 2008; Blair and Capel, 2008; Griffiths et al, 2009; Sloan, 2010). Coupled with this is the relatively recent change in government which has far reaching implications for primary PE. So much so that perhaps now, with the dismantling of the

School Sports Partnership programme (SSP), may be a good time to embrace wholesale change, to ensure the positive changes recognised over the last 10 years through the SSP strategy (BBC, 2010) [Online] were not in vain.

The challenge is accentuated by growing concern with the number of children and adolescents adopting sedentary lifestyles (Biddle et al. 1998). This recent end to SSPs was considered 'ill-conceived' by 75 top British athletes who, according to the BBC (2010) [Online], wrote to the current prime minister, Mr Cameron, to argue that the changes put the fight against childhood obesity and other illnesses at risk. Not only does inactivity have profound effects on the health of the young (Sallis et al, 1988), but the lack of physical literacy at KS1 and KS2 may have ramifications for health throughout life (Sallis & McKenzie, 1991). Therefore, the continuation of physical activity provides both short and long term health benefits as regular exercise encourages positive health behaviours into adulthood. The importance of high quality PE in countering this issue is stated in the current secondary curriculum (QCDA, 2007), which claims, 'physical activity contributes to the healthy functioning of the body and mind and is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle' (QCA, 2007:3).

The introduction of Specialist Sports Colleges and SSPs in 2000 (Youth Sport Trust, 2010) heralded a new era for primary school sport, together with the expansion of participation level sports coaching being increasingly utilised in primary schools. However, Carney and Howells (2008:iii) claim that 'coaches with sport specific knowledge but without an education background are not the answer.' They proposed that every primary school should have a 'Primary Physical Education Specialist' (Carney and Howells, 2008). This perspective has widespread support and Blackburn (2001:5, cited in Sloan, 2010) states it is likely to be the 'single most effective influence in achieving pupil attainment in physical education'.

The partnership strategy, developed by the SSPs, was set-up to enhance sport participation (Youth Sport Trust, 2010). Key responsibility for this lay with each Partnership Development Manager (PDM), who managed the SSP and whose full-time role was to develop strategic links with key partners including primary schools. It is generally recognised that this has

enhanced the physical experiences of primary school pupils (Youth Sport Trust, 2010). The School Sports Coordinators (SSCo's), although usually based in a secondary school, concentrated on improving school sport opportunities, including out of school hours school learning, intra and inter-school competition and club links, across a family of schools. Primary Link Teachers (PLT's), who were normally existing primary teachers with a special interest in PE, were also a part of this process and were based in primary schools to help improve the quality of PE as well as ensuring equal opportunity and inclusion (Youth Sport Trust, 2010).

The SSCO's have been widely utilised in schools and within the community, and have proved essential in introducing new ways in linking pupils to after-school clubs and alternative sports programmes (Sport England, 2002). Furthermore, each SSP was assigned a coaching grant of £21,500 in 2008 to enable the employment of up to 5 coaches to deliver circa 1000 hours of high quality coaching activity (DCMS, 2008), thus giving a clear indication of the acceptance by the government of coaches as professional deliverers of sport to school children, in a bid to achieve the 5 hours of physical activity. Additionally, the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links Strategy (PESSCL), which was the precursor to the PE Sports Strategy for Young People (PESSYP), claimed Professional Development as one of its eight programmes, which was supposed to offer opportunities and support for teachers to gain the expertise they need to offer high quality PE (DCMS, 2003). The success of this agenda has been questionable at best.

#### **The 5 Hour Offer and the National Curriculum**

One aim of the PESSYP strategy was the 'five-hour offer' (Youth Sports Trust, 2008), which was claimed would: 'increase the number of 5–16 year-olds taking part in at least two hours of high-quality PE and sport at school each week; and create new opportunities for them to participate in up to a further three hours each week of sporting activity, through school, voluntary and community providers.' (DCMS, 2008)

It was always proposed that this additional provision would be supplied by sports coaches, and delivered through the PESSYP strategy. This aspiration has further 'blurred' the boundaries between PE and sports coaching. This government aspiration for all children to have access to 5 hours of high quality sport (Youth Sports Trust, 2008) proved to be wholly unrealistic, especially for primary schools. This is illustrated through a recent study which involved measuring primary PE contact time across a random selection of primary schools (Hannay, 2008). It emerged that in KS1 the

children received an average of 1.49 hours of PE per week, of which 74% was games based (Hannay, 2008). Of these games lessons 12% were delivered by Teaching Assistants (TA's) covering Planning, Preparation and Assessment time (PPA). In the same study an average of 1.6 hours per week of PE was noted for KS2, of which 44% was games, and 40% of those lessons were delivered by coaches in curriculum time. It was further found that when looking at the whole PE delivery, not just the games, the coaches 'taught' more PE lessons than the class teachers. Hannay (2008:iv) concluded that this evidence 'may suggest that some primary teachers may not understand the important role that physical education should play in the life of every child.' However, this government funded provision must surely have been better than the rather sporadic nature of the extracurricular provision prior to the introduction of SSPs or the Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links Strategy (PESSCL) (DCMS, 2003), which relied solely on the goodwill of PE teachers. The outcome of recent government changes in this area indicate that it is likely that schools may return to a pre PESSCL situation.

#### **The Teaching/Coaching Relationship**

The implementation of the aforementioned strategies over the past 10 years has seen an increase in the use of qualified sports coaches, especially in primary schools. This is perhaps due to the fact that the depth of sport and PE expertise, knowledge and understanding of generalist primary teachers is not as great as in secondary schools. Additionally, coaching was introduced as one of the ten work strands of the PESSYP strategy and included initiatives such as 'school sport coaching', 'recruit into coaching' and 'sport unlimited', and the need for more qualified coaches working in/with schools had never been greater (Youth Sport Trust, 2008). The expansion of the Specialist Sport College network and the creation of SSCO's helped blur the boundaries between the fields of PE teaching and sports coaching. Teachers needed to be able to coach, and coaches had been, for some time, working within the school system. Subsequently, the link between education and coaching has never been clearer. As a result, it could be argued that the need for coaches and PE teachers to have an understanding of both fields is crucial. With this point considered, the discipline of sports coaching can now more confidently defend itself as an educational component in the relationship, and coaching pedagogy is an important part of this (Jones et al, 2004).

Lyle (2002:10) added even more depth to this debate, claiming 'a situation has developed over time in which PE teaching and [sports] coaching were regarded as synonymous', a position which, it could be argued, did

not help the 'professionalism' of teaching. Lyle (2002) also believed, interestingly, that it was also not helping the coaching profession. He maintained that all the influences and interactions made it hardly surprising that there had been a symbiosis between PE teaching and coaching, and many teachers, by virtue of requirements of their roles, became involved in coaching, perhaps more so in secondary education.

A frequently raised argument has been the coach's perceived lack of educational subject knowledge in comparison with the PE teacher (Carney and Howells, 2008). When considering secondary education this argument may be justified, with much evidence supporting the PE teacher's knowledge of children's physical activity theory, such as fundamental movement skills. However, with Blair and Capel (2008) claiming that the primary school teacher receives a maximum of 12 hours of PE subject knowledge throughout the whole of their teacher training and little, if any, theory, this claim has little grounding. Additionally, since the advent of the UKCC coaching awards, many National Governing Bodies (NGBs) would strongly argue that these areas are now adequately covered in their courses. Moreover, evidence drawn from an interview with a head of primary ITE for this paper, confirmed primary trainees received no training whatsoever on classroom management and organisation in a PE environment, an area recognised as very important to PE teachers. With this evidence it is possible that the well qualified sports coach would offer a better learning experience in PE for the child than the non-subject specific primary school teacher. The research of Lavin et al (2008), however, stressed the concerns of the majority of teachers that some of the coaches employed were unable to exercise appropriate levels of control and behaviour management, hence supporting the views of Carney and Howells (2008), who acknowledge a coach's sport specific knowledge, but question their pedagogical understanding.

While it is clear from the evidence of the primary research that sports coaching and the teaching of PE are two distinct professions that are not synonymous, an increasing body of literature supports the view that they are also becoming more symbiotic (Cassidy et al, 2008). Not only do both professions specialise in the education of the young within a sporting realm, but they also have similar philosophies and an aspiration of high expectation from the children they coach and teach. This narrowing of the gap is highlighted by Kidman (2005) who, although accepting within her work that a notable divide often exists between sports coaching and teaching, states that:

Some speak of a gap between educators and coaches but, in reality, many of us are trying to get rid of this perceived gap. Educators and coaches can learn from each other; educators and coaches can learn from athletes. The athletes [and pupils] are the ones who benefit from this sharing of ideas. . . . No one has all the answers, but through conversations observations we can learn from each other. (Kidman, 2005:286)

This is a view also supported by Jones (2006:8) who concludes that 'on closer inspection then, perhaps the constructed divide between teaching and coaching is not so wide or deep as we have imagined it to be.'

### **Primary Physical Education**

Armstrong and Welsman (1997) still believe that for people to have a positive experience and appreciation of physical activity, the best vehicle for delivering it is during primary physical education. This is due to the fact that for most children it is the first setting in which they are introduced to structured physical activity, therefore it should be made fun for them so it is seen by them as a positive experience. Furthermore, for many children, trying to promote PE and sport at the start of secondary education is already too late (Jess et al, 2007, cited in Sloan, 2010).

According to Lavin et al (2008:ix), '[the] issue of who is delivering physical education in schools is an area of growing concern and interest to the profession'. They go on to claim that it is no secret that sports coaches are already being used in primary schools both inside and outside of curriculum time. Lavin et al (2008) found that, of the 124 schools used, 86% used sports coaches, adult support learners (ASL's), or TA's in their PE curriculum. This appears to be a high level of unqualified teaching staff delivering in curriculum time. This figure is tempered slightly by the statistics that state a further 86% of this first figure claim to have a teacher sitting in on the PE lessons (Lavin et al, 2008:ix). However, a vast majority of those teachers present maintain they do so as a method of furthering their own continuing professional development (CPD), rather than being able to support the delivery. The main reason cited for this was professed as once again being an unsatisfactory level of PE learning in their initial teacher education (Price, 2008; Blair and Capel, 2008).

In the context of primary school PE teaching, Blair and Capel (2008) argue that 'generalist primary teachers do not perceive themselves to be adequately prepared to teach physical education in their initial teacher education (ITE)' (Blair and Capel, 2008:ix). This position is supported by Sloan (2010:269) who alleges that a 'lack of belief in personal ability to teach PE should come as

no great surprise as they [primary teachers] are non-specialists and are required to teach it often after very few hours of training'. Therefore, it could be argued that the learning experience of the child may well be greatly improved, in a primary PE environment, perhaps by the use of well-trained sports coaches, and of course, this should be less about the desires of the teacher and more about the learning needs of the pupil.

This view is further supported by primary research for this paper where a primary school head teacher who advocated the use of coaches to 'skill up' the members of staff and insisted on the member of staff being with the coaches during lessons, to 'pick up on tips and techniques that they use'. This was more as a CPD opportunity for staff rather than time out, due to the concern of staff being de-skilled. He further claimed, 'I know of other schools where when they have coaches in they [the staff] are off, and they use it as an additional PPA time.' Yet, when asked if the use of coaches in PE time de-professionalises teachers, the head teacher believed it to be so, but by de-skilling the teacher who would normally teach the class PE, and not by the less professional practices of the coach, thus again implying the coach is a better option for the children than the usual teacher. The head teacher believed the use of coaches was good because the pupils received high quality sport and PE delivery, but in terms of CPD that member of staff would never see any progression in their teaching of that subject.

The primary head teacher did however support the views of the SSCo's utilised in this research who, when asked opinions regarding the teaching of PE in primary schools, expressed the view that initial teacher education was inadequate in equipping primary teachers to teach PE, and hence they did not generally do it well.

A specialist primary PE teacher within the authority was also interviewed as part of this study, and believed the PE within his school was of a consistently high standard, but was concerned about the skill levels of his non-PE specialist colleagues. This further adds weight to the de-skilling argument. He further thought that the impact on PE delivery in the event that he, or the current head teacher, were to leave the school, were quite profound. This view supports the beliefs of Carney and Howells (2008) who argue that 'the primary class teacher cannot and should not be separated from engaging in PE, as this does not reflect the holistic view of primary education'. However, they do propose that every primary school should have a 'Primary Physical Education Specialist' (Carney and Howells, 2008), further supporting the views of Evans (2007) that teaching is an 'extended

professional' role. This was also the opinion of the primary PE specialist interviewed.

In countering this position, an unexpected stance of the primary head teacher interviewed was that he would not want to see the use of specialist PE teachers in primary schools as this would also have the effect of 'de-skilling' existing primary teachers. This assumes they were considered professionally 'skilled' in teaching PE to start with! Equally surprising was that the specialist PE teacher interviewed had the same reservations. However, he did expand his view and believed that if all primary schools adopted this structure then perhaps these reservations would be less of a concern, which concurred with the findings and recommendation of this research.

A PDM in this unitary authority claimed:

'What you have got now is the primary teachers with 5-8 hours training on the delivery of physical education then they go in to primary teaching. You would expect them, with all the legislation and health & safety surrounding PE and gymnastics, you cannot expect in 8 hours [to cover it]. A level 2 coaching award is longer than 8 hours.'

Yet the government and Initial Teacher Training establishments deem it appropriate to trust the physical development of our children to teachers with as little as six hours total training in PE.

#### **Initial Teacher Training for Primary Physical Education**

Carney and Howells (2008) support the views of Blair and Capel (2008) affirming that due to the lack of time for physical education in initial teacher training, primary school teachers are not trained specialists in PE. This view is supported by Griffiths et al (2009) who claimed 40% of primary school teachers indicated that the PE component of their initial teacher training was not effective enough to prepare them for delivery. In fact Blair and Capel (2008) expand this view further claiming that research has shown that 40% of all newly qualified teachers (NQT) of primary education received a total of only six hours of PE [subject knowledge] throughout their whole initial teacher training (ITT). The result is that PE is often not being taught to the desired, and prescribed quality as outlined in the National Curriculum (Sloan, 2010). Sloan's study found that a 'lack of personal PE specific subject knowledge was highlighted as a prominent issue in terms of planning effectively across all activity areas (Sloan, 2010:273), and is unlikely to improve due to current ITE and government proposals. OfSTED (2009) further claimed that this has resulted in primary teachers with an 'inadequate subject knowledge, limited understanding of progression and a

weak grasp of assessment'. This was not a very endearing endorsement from the body responsible for educational standards, and prompted the plea for 'a change of the routine and engrained practice and relatively superficial [PE] knowledge base of most primary school teachers' (Waring et al, 2007:35).

Keay (2006) further claims that due to the very limited subject knowledge opportunities during ITT, or for CPD thereafter, teachers will tend to make few alterations to their practice, and subsequently maintain 'a role with which they are comfortable' (Keay, 2006:370). Although many primary teachers are uncomfortable teaching PE, it is not claimed that physical activity is not occurring. Rather it is a 'quality' not a 'quantity' issue, as Doherty and Brennan (2008) contend that the majority of teachers in primary schools simply feel they do not have the subject knowledge required.

Pill (2007) maintains that whilst physical activity is occurring, the quality of what is happening is questionable despite educators in the primary years being uncomfortable with teaching of PE. Furthermore, Morgan and Bourke (2008:46) claimed that many primary teachers would prefer not to teach PE at all, hence strategies must be devised to improve training and support for teachers, or the employment of specialist PE teachers needs to be made a priority. Perhaps the resurrection of the CPD element of the PESSCL and the development of local delivery agencies may be a more realistic option.

When considering the primary specialist PE teacher option, Price (2008) and Carney and Howells (2008) suggested that this 'specialist' should not be the teacher of all school PE, but rather a model of good practice who can support other teachers in their development of good practice whilst maintaining an understanding of the education of primary aged children. In addition, Carney and Howells (2008:iv) argue that 'the primary class teacher cannot and should not be separated from engaging in PE, as this does not reflect the holistic view of primary education'. Additionally, it is believed that primary teachers would resent being placed on the periphery of teaching PE (Sloan, 2010). Yet Lavin et al's (2008) article claimed 84% of primary teachers sit in on coaches delivery of curriculum PE to further their own CPD. Thus implying that primary teachers believed the coaches were more knowledgeable than themselves. A view enhanced by Griggs and Ward (2010) who, from feedback given by a number of PLT's in a recent research project, indicated their reliance on sports coaches to raise the standards of delivery of PE.

Sloan (2010) also argues that there are those who oppose the idea of a 'specialist', believing that 'the value

of primary education lies in the same teacher delivering the curriculum as a whole, making links between different aspects of the curriculum and in knowing children as individuals, with their individual needs' (Wright, 2002; cited in Sloan, 2010). However, this paper does not recommend an 'all or nothing' solution, but rather the primary teacher remains responsible for all subjects other than the three specialist foundation subjects of PE, music and modern foreign languages (MFL), thus maintaining a pastoral vision of primary education. Furthermore, most of this debate has focussed on the teacher when perhaps it should focus more on the learning experience of the child. The research throughout this study has highlighted that the specialist primary PE teacher would offer a better learning experience. It could also be argued that this would not remove the holistic nature, and pastoral care element, of primary education as all other subjects remain as they are, but actually create a far better PE learning experience for the child. PE is distinctive from all other subjects mainly due to its unique organisational setting and the exclusive strategies required to teach this.

Further confusion was originally highlighted by Scraton and Flintoff (2002) who warned of the conflict between the competing interests of PE and sport, and the different respective personnel associated with their delivery. Marsden and Weston (2007) supported these concerns claiming there were clear differences in the discourses of these two practices. They justify their position with the belief that sport is competitive with opportunities for the gifted child to excel, whilst others are left isolated (Marsden and Weston, 2007), whereas PE should benefit every child equally and purposefully (Capel, 1997). All of this is further compounded, claim Blair and Capel (2008), by the confusion of the terms physical education and sport in the primary domain. This is further exacerbated by the current Education Secretary (Gove, 2010) who, when recently discussing changes to the PE Programme of Study, consistently refers to the educational practice of PE as 'sport', and specifically focusing on competitive games.

A final point for consideration, which once again supports the use of PE trained specialists for primary schools, is that teachers, who view their own physical activity experiences as positive, are likely to be more effective in promoting physical activity to children than those who dislike physical activity (Sallis and McKenzie, 1991). Furthermore, Carney et al. (1998, cited in Morgan et al, 2001) stated that 'primary student teachers with negative prior experiences held such strong beliefs about their abilities that it affected their learning at university'.

It can logically be argued then that teachers' attitudes and enthusiasm towards PE will affect outcome attainment of students. Downey (1979) described a situation where teachers tended to replicate their school experiences and may unwittingly perpetuate to students their own negative experience. That is, children are subject to physical education lessons of poor quality and quantity, and in turn may enter the teaching profession to perpetuate the same system. Many scholars believe that teachers' prior experiences are so powerful that pre-service training may have little effect on their beliefs, particularly if they oppose already held beliefs (Carney et al, 1998). This resistance can become a source of frustration for teacher educators when pre-service teachers' beliefs, acquired at school, conflict with beliefs imparted or encouraged during teacher training. Anecdotal evidence shows this position could equally be applied to HE teachers of primary initial teacher trainees, who have preconceived beliefs of the importance, or lack of, of PE (Morgan, et al, 2001).

### Conclusion

In summary, research has shown that ITT amounts to a maximum of 12 hours PE subject knowledge, which falls far short of the amount required to ensure primary teachers feel confident or safe delivering PE. In comparison, the UK coaching system requires level one coaches to undertake a minimum of 16 hours tuition to assist in delivering in one area of sport. Perhaps due to this, and the work of SSPs over the past 10 years, many coaches have been employed in primary schools for both extracurricular and curriculum delivery, and many primary teachers observed these sessions/lessons, with around 80% viewing this as a form of CPD, as a consequence, arguably learning their PE from coaches. Furthermore, many come into ITT with preconceived views of PE, shaped from their own schooling experiences, which are difficult or impossible to change. They then replicate these views in their own teaching.

Many primary teacher trainees, and teachers, also feel uncomfortable teaching PE due to the nature of the subject – and simply do not want to, and do not see the importance in PE as a subject. Overall, most primary delivery could be better described as Physical Activity rather than PE, as most teachers have a very limited understanding of what constitutes National Curriculum PE.

A clear conclusion drawn from all the evidence thus far is that, perhaps along with music and MFL, a subject specialist should be introduced into primary schools nationally. It is therefore suggested that specialist primary PE teachers are trained, and that this be introduced as a national strategy (Blair and Capel, 2008;

Carney and Howells, 2008). These should still be primary teachers with the knowledge and understanding of the holistic nature of this profession, not 're-badged' secondary teachers. As such, the HE sector needs to embrace this vision and perhaps, a) create a structure where there are appropriate, and specific, undergraduate programmes in primary PE which feed into an existing PGCE route, GTP or SCITT, and b) create better cross subject links between the subjects of primary education and PE provision to enable this creation. This may also help to alleviate the problems created by the governments current drive away from the traditional college based undergraduate teaching degrees towards the more post graduate, classroom based education being mooted by Gove (2010).

Finally, better CPD for the existing primary sector will be needed in the interim period specifically for those who would want to take on this role until the first specialists are trained. Although much evidence gathered for this study indicated that this could 'de-skill' primary teachers of their ability to deliver curriculum PE, the vast majority of those involved in this research believed it would result in the best learning experience for the child, and this must surely be the most important factor in the development of children.

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## Ethical Issues in Pedagogic Research

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### Abstract

This paper explores the ethical issues identified by a research ethics committee (REC) over a three-year period. The REC is situated in a medium-sized university in the north west of England and deals exclusively with proposals for pedagogic research. The purpose of the research was to identify the nature and frequency of ethical concerns expressed by the REC, in order to improve guidance for future applicants. The most common concern was the lack, or inaccuracy, of the information provided to potential participants by which

they were expected to make an informed decision about participation. Other concerns included the potential for bias, the lack of information provided to the REC, the provision for fair access by vulnerable groups and undue influence on voluntary participation. The paper concludes that the potential risks of practitioners researching their own students are not given due consideration by many applicants. In particular the potential threats to valid informed consent are identified. Implications for improving the relationship